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ABSTRACT

An employer survey was designed and conducted to assess the availability of employment opportunities for individuals holding a master's degree in Corporate and Professional Communication within the primary geographic area of Radford University, Virginia. Surveys were mailed to 5,004 companies and organizations categorized as follows: (1) communications industries (publishing, TV-radio, advertising, cable-TV, and data communication businesses); (2) national advertisers; (3) personnel and training administrators; and (4) public relations directors. Analysis of the 435 returned surveys indicated that strong employment opportunities do exist for graduates of master's programs in Corporate and Professional Communication which implies that employers are recognizing the importance of effective communication in the workplace. However, a conservative approach was adopted in interpreting the results of the survey due to a number of factors, including, the fact that attitude surveys are imperfect measures of behavior; and a low response rate limits the generalizability of results. Five references and six tables are included. (LPT)

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A SURVEY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRADUATES WITH A MASTER'S IN CORPORATE AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY

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HE 024 111

A SURVEY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRADUATES WITH A MASTER'S IN CORPORATE AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY

An employer survey was designed to assess employment opportunities in the primary region served by a university for individuals holding a master's in Corporate and Professional Communication. The survey results can conservatively be interpreted as indicating that there are many positions, upper-level positions, opportunities for advancement and opportunities for increased earnings available to qualified applicants holding a master's in Corporate and Professional Communication.

Frank La Ban compared the number of graduate degrees conferred in Speech to the job listings of the SCA Placement Service in the early to mid-seventies. He concluded that the number of graduate degrees being granted exceeded available job opportunities to the extent that a moratorium on new graduate programs should be enacted at once (1977).

La Ban's conclusion, even if correct, is now dated. Furthermore, his analysis of employment opportunities is flawed: SCA Placement Service listings indicate few of the employment opportunities available in business, government, etc. However, his challenge to consider job opportunities in developing graduate programs is compelling. Prospective students are increasingly concerned with the effect of graduate education on prospects for employment.

Speech communication skills are becoming more widely recognized as essential to success in many careers as we move into the information age. Surveys of business executives provide strong support for training in corporate and professional communication. Respondents to a survey conducted by Rader and Wunsch (1980) indicated that both written and oral communication are very important on the job; 62% indicated that effective writing was important, and 90% reported that effective oral communication was important on the job.

In addition to such self-report data, investigators have surveyed experts regarding the importance of effective communication in business and industry. Eighty-five percent of personnel officers surveyed indicated that an employee's success on the job was dependent upon the ability to communicate effectively (Belohlov, Popp & Porte, 1974). This conclusion was reinforced by the Heisler study (1978) which reported that promotions are based primarily upon communication skills, self-direction, cooperativeness, problem-solving skills and record of accomplishments.

A recent survey of a random sample of 1,000 personnel managers in the United States indicated that the skills most valued in the contemporary job market are communication skills. Oral communication, listening ability and enthusiasm were ranked as the top three factors in helping college graduates obtain employment; and interpersonal skills and oral communication skills were ranked as the top two factors for successful job performance (Curtis, Winsor & Stephens, 1989). Based on data from their personnel manager respondents, Curtis, Winsor and Stephens developed an "ideal management profile" composed of 14 items. The five top-ranked items (listed here in descending order) pertain to speech communication: (1) ability to work well with others one-on-one, (2) ability to gather accurate information from others to make a decision, (3) ability to work well in small

groups, (4) ability to listen effectively and give counsel and (5) ability to give effective feedback.

The studies discussed above are but a few of many that clearly demonstrate the general need for training in corporate and professional communication. However, prospective graduate students are often more interested in employment prospects within the region served by their University. Thus, the authors developed a survey of potential employers within the primary geographic area served by the university to determine regional employment prospects for graduates holding a master's degree in Corporate and Professional Communication.

Employer survey[1]

The purpose of the employer survey was to determine if there were jobs, upper-level jobs, opportunities for advancement and opportunities for higher earning power available within the region to qualified individuals holding an M.S. in Corporate and Professional Communication.

Sampling procedure

A group of department faculty assessed mailing list categories available from a commercial mailing list firm. Their intent was to identify companies and organizations most likely to be interested in employing graduates of the proposed master's program. The following four strata were

selected for the employer survey: (1) communication industries including publishing, TV-radio, advertising, telephone, cable-TV, and data communication businesses; (2) national advertisers; (3) personnel and training administrators; and (4) public relations directors.

Mailing lists for each of those four strata were requested for the primary geographic area served by the university, and the mailing list company scanned all labels to ensure no duplication of firms within each stratum. In addition, three faculty carefully scanned the labels to remove duplicates between strata. The intent was to avoid sending more than one survey to a given address to prevent counting the jobs available in a given firm more than once.

Administration procedure

The entire population (5,004) within the sampling frame was surveyed in an attempt to estimate T as accurately as possible within a stated bound of 95% confidence.[2] The employer survey, which included a description of the proposed graduate program, and a postage paid envelope with return address were mailed on December 8, 1987. All useable responses to the employer survey received by January 11, 1988 were tabulated. A total of 435 responses, an 8.7% return rate, were received.

Results

Items from the employer survey are presented below along with results for each item.

Other qualifications being equal, applicants for current, or anticipated, positions in your organization would be more competitive if they had a Master's in Communication. (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree.

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents (257 cases) either strongly agreed or agreed that, other qualifications being equal, applicants would be more competitive if they obtained the proposed master's in Corporate and Professional Communication (see TABLE 1). Only 21.1% (92 cases) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Other qualifications being equal, approximately how many positions in your organization would be more available to an applicant with the Master's in Communication than to an applicant without such a degree? (1) none, (2) one, (3) two, (4) three, (5) four, (6) five or more.

Sixty-one percent of the executives of the companies surveyed (266 cases) indicated that one or more positions would be more available in their organization to qualified

applicants holding the master's degree in Corporate and Professional Communication than to applicants without such a degree (see TABLE 2). At least 575 available positions were reported by the 433 respondents. Based on the 8.7% response rate to the employer survey, the number of positions available in the 5,004 organizations surveyed may be estimated to be 6,645 positions (plus or minus 702 positions) at a 95% confidence level.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Approximately how many upper-level positions in your organization might be available to a qualified applicant with the M.S. in Communication? (1) none, (2) one, (3) two, (4) three, (5) four, (6) five or more.

Seventy-four percent of the executive respondents (322 cases) indicated that one or more *upper-level* positions would be available to qualified applicants holding the proposed master's degree (see TABLE 3). At least 555 available upper-level positions were reported by the 434 respondents. Based on the 8.7% response rate to the employer survey, the number of upper-level positions available in the 5,004 organizations surveyed may be

estimated to be 6,399 upper-level positions (plus or minus 562 upper-level positions) at a 95% confidence level.

TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Assuming the degree's relevance to job responsibilities, an employee in your organization would probably earn more per year by holding an M.S. in Communication. (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree.

Forty-three percent of the respondents (187 cases) either strongly agreed or agreed that, assuming the degree's relevance to job responsibilities, an employee would earn more if he/she obtained a master's in Corporate and Professional Communication (see TABLE 4). Only 26.7% (116 cases) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this survey item.

TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

The Master's in Communication would be valuable to some of your employees seeking job advancement/promotions. (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree.

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents (252 cases) either strongly agreed or agreed that the master's in

Communication would be valuable to some of their employees seeking job advancement or promotion (see TABLE 5). Only 14.7% (64 cases) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this survey item.

TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE

For some managerial positions in your organization, the Master's in Communication would be as valuable as an MBA to an applicant. (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) neutral, (4) disagree, (5) strongly disagree.

Forty-five percent of the respondents (195 cases) either strongly agreed or agreed that the master's in Communication would be as valuable as an MBA to applicants for some managerial positions in their organization (see TABLE 6). Only 32.5% (140 cases) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this survey item.

TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE

Interpretation of results

A conservative approach must be taken in interpreting the results of the employer survey. The following factors may have produced inflated results: (1) Attitude surveys are imperfect measures of *behavior*. (2) Those employers most

interested in the proposed master's may have been most likely to return the survey. (3) The relatively low response rate (8.7%) limits the generalizability of results to the survey population. (4) The brief description of the proposed master's that was included in the survey may have been insufficient to provide a clear basis for informed response.

However, it may be assumed that there would be many other employment opportunities available to graduates from the proposed master's program outside the population surveyed (e.g., in government, education, consulting, or in businesses that were not included in the surveyed population). It should also be noted that some master's graduates would undoubtedly seek employment outside the geographic limits of the population surveyed.

Discussion

The employer survey was designed to assess employment opportunities in the primary region served by the university for students holding a master's degree in Corporate and Professional Communication. Conservative interpretations of the survey results appear to justify the following conclusions:

1. A substantial number of positions in the region served by the university would be *more* available to a

qualified applicant with the M.S. in Communication than to an applicant without such a degree.

2. A substantial number of *upper-level* positions in the region served by the university would be available to a qualified applicant with the M.S. in Communication.
3. Ignoring neutral responses, a majority of executives surveyed reported that a master's in Corporate and Professional Communication would:
   a. Make qualified applicants more competitive for positions.
   b. Increase earning power if relevant to job responsibilities.
   c. Be valuable to some employees seeking job advancement.
   d. Be as valuable as an MBA for applicants for some managerial positions in the organizations.

Growing recognition by employers of the importance of effective communication skills in the work place and the results of this survey appear to indicate strong employment opportunities for graduates of master's programs in Corporate and Professional Communication.

NOTES

[1]A copy of the employer survey instrument may be obtained by writing to the first author.

[2]Many factors influenced the sample size selected. In particular, the population size, the expected response rate, the expected magnitude of T (for the two items dealing with positions available to potential employees), the strata sizes, the strata variances and the desired accuracy of estimates from the responses were all considered.

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TABLE 1

Applicants More Competitive with
Master's Degree in Communication

Agreement	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	60	13.8
Agree	197	45.3
Neutral	86	19.8
Disagree	74	17.0
Strongly disagree	18	4.1

N = 435

TABLE 2

Number of Positions More Available to
Applicant with Master's Degree in Communication

Positions Available	Frequency	Percent	Total Available
None	167	38.6	
One	120	27.7	1 x 120 = 120
Two	71	16.4	2 x 71 = 142
Three	24	5.5	3 x 24 = 72
Four	14	3.2	4 x 14 = 56
Five or more	37	8.5	5 x 37 = 185
			TOTAL = 575

N = 433

TABLE 3

Number of Upper-Level Positions Available
to Applicant with Master's Degree in Communication

Upper-Level Positions Available	Frequency	Percent	Total Available
None	112	25.8	
One	191	44.0	1 x 191 = 191
Two	76	17.5	2 x 76 = 152
Three	28	6.5	3 x 28 = 84
Four	7	1.6	4 x 7 = 28
Five or more	20	4.6	5 x 20 = 100
			TOTAL = 555

N = 434

TABLE 4

Employee Earns More Holding
Master's Degree in Communication

Agreement	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	26	6.0
Agree	161	37.0
Neutral	132	30.3
Disagree	84	19.3
Strongly disagree	32	7.4

N = 435

TABLE 5

Master's Degree in Communication
Valuable for Seeking Advancement

Agreement	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	46	10.6
Agree	206	47.4
Neutral	119	27.4
Disagree	49	11.3
Strongly disagree	15	3.4

N = 435

TABLE 6

Master's Degree in Communication
as Valuable as MBA for Some Positions

Agreement	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	46	10.7
Agree	149	34.6
Neutral	96	22.3
Disagree	88	20.4
Strongly disagree	52	12.1

N = 431